

## online voices

### Online Voices for Recovery

People and organizations use the Web to communicate about addiction and recovery throughout the year, as well as during **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** each September. During this year's **Recovery Month** and beyond, learn how people discuss substance use disorders online so you can participate in the online conversation.

To complement other toolkit materials, this guide provides tools and resources to help you:

- **Understand** what online resources are available; and
- **Determine** the most effective ways you can contribute online.

Use these resources to promote this year's **Recovery Month** campaign theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Now More than Ever!”**, which aims to reach people who are susceptible to alcohol and/or drug use during times of stress. Your online activities can support one of the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) 10 Strategic Initiatives** to increase the understanding of mental illness and substance use disorder prevention and treatment services. (Visit <http://www.samhsa.gov> and click on “About Us.”)

#### TOOLKIT TIP

To learn about specific social media Web sites, refer to the **“New Media Glossary”** on the **Recovery Month** Web site at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>. For ways to reach out to your local community, refer to the Media Outreach section also on the Web site.

### Understand the Online Space

You may find three different types of information online about substance use:

- **Current research** and publications about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery.
- **News or discussion** about prominent people with addiction or who are in recovery. You may even find coverage about **Recovery Month** events in your own community.
- **Firsthand accounts** from people who have (or know someone who has) successfully achieved long-term recovery, as well as others who have grown up with a parent with an addiction. These voices give realistic and honest perspectives about substance use disorders and the hope of recovery.

Addiction can be a sensitive issue for many, even for those who choose to discuss it in such a public forum as the Internet. Before you engage in any discussion online, please keep these tips in mind:

- **Respect privacy** – In some cases, you may know who is writing a piece online, especially if it is on a newspaper's Web site or by a well-known blogger whose identity is public. But if it is a personal blog or a message board, you may not be able to identify the writer. The online world can reinforce the anonymity traditions of many mutual support groups and offer a familiar, comforting outlet for people in recovery and for their impacted family members. Keep this in mind when speaking about or to anyone online.
- **Analyze your contribution** – Many people use the Internet because it is non-confrontational and they can openly discuss their problems. Extensively review the forum or blog you want to contribute to before you weigh in. Identify your strengths as an organization or individual, such as strong knowledge of treatment and recovery options, and the resources you offer to ensure that your input is well received by other readers and participants.

## How to Engage

Many resources help locate sites where conversations occur. In addition to the many resources available at the **Recovery Month** Web site, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, there are tools to help you locate specific conversations on blogs and message boards. Some blog search engines to try are:

- **Google Blog Search**, which you can search by date and relevance at <http://blogsearch.google.com>. Use it to see what bloggers are discussing about a specific topic, such as addiction or recovery. Understanding what the blogger writes about, especially what is discussed in his or her latest blog post, is important if you want to develop a relationship with that writer.
- **Blog Pulse**, which you can search by date and relevance at <http://www.blogpulse.com>. Use it to create a graph that plots the amount of online conversations taking place about a specific topic related to addiction. This will help you identify ways to positively contribute to this conversation.

Once you are ready to offer your input online, follow these steps:

**Connect on social networks.** Social networking Web sites, such as Facebook, accessible at <http://www.facebook.com>, and Twitter, accessible at <http://www.twitter.com>, are a great way to connect with people and are free to join. Use them to share your story and resources. Be sure to get permission from individuals before posting their names and/or photos online. **Recovery Month** has a strong online presence through its Facebook fan page at <http://www.facebook.com/RecoveryMonth>, YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/RecoveryMonth> and Twitter account at <http://www.twitter.com/RecoveryMonth>. Below are some additional tips for using social networks.

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- **Facebook** – In addition to actively participating in **Recovery Month's** Facebook page, you can use the site in other ways. If you or your organization already has a Facebook page, make sure to post information about your event or activities on your wall and continue to update your page as **Recovery Month** gets closer. Also, create a separate event page to allow you to invite others to RSVP for your activities and see who else is attending.
- **YouTube** – A short video (two minutes maximum) is a fun and interactive way to promote your event or organization online. Be creative! Film your **Recovery Month** activities or discuss recovery or your organization. Be careful when using copyrighted materials including music; many songs and movie clips require gaining the rights to use them and it is illegal to use them without permission. When in doubt, stick to original material.
- **Twitter** – This real-time, short-messaging service allows you to spread the word about your event and organization in several ways. Using your organization's Twitter account (create one by going to <http://www.twitter.com> and clicking "Sign Up Now"), you can send messages about your event in short messages (140 characters or less) that can be easily "retweeted" (or resent) by other users who forward something you have tweeted. Use the hashtag **#RecoveryMonth** or create another hashtag for your activities that will allow users to easily search for what you and others are saying about this. Hashtags, which use "#" and a key phrase, are used in messages to collect conversations about a specific topic. It's also best to tweet frequently to keep the interest of those who follow your updates.

**Connect on message boards and blogs** using the following tips:

- **Comment on other people's blog posts** and let them know that there are resources available to help them; direct people to <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.
- **Offer resources and support.** Treatment and recovery services are sometimes offered online, and anonymous users may post messages about how their recovery is going. Respond with words of encouragement or other helpful information and resources you may know. Let them know about **Recovery Month activities** and ways to get involved to further the campaign's reach.
- **Participate regularly in message boards** about addiction and recovery and offer resources and tips from your own or your organization's expertise.
- **Create your own blog** about your daily work, **Recovery Month activities**, any coalition work, or even your own experiences with alcohol and drug addiction, treatment, and recovery.

If you decide to start a blog, keep in mind that:

- **Blogging requires a large commitment.** Creating and maintaining a successful blog requires a considerable commitment. Coming up with fresh and new content and posting it at regular intervals is key to a blog's success. If you don't think you will be able to post a new entry on most days, your time might be better spent participating in other conversations, rather than starting your own.

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## resources

- **Many similar blogs already exist.** Many people or organizations start a blog because it is a well-known online communications tool. Before you embark on adding your point of view, do some research to make sure that your point of view will be unique and there is an audience for what you will discuss.

To help you start your own blog, there are many Web sites that you can consult, such as Wordpress, accessible at <http://www.wordpress.com>, or Blogger, accessible at <http://www.blogger.com>. Once you name your blog and start to post, use social networking Web sites to promote it. You can also add the **Recovery Month** Events Widget, accessible at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Community-Events/Events-Widget.aspx>, to promote your specific event or all **Recovery Month** events on your blog or Web site. A widget is an online tool added to Web sites that displays or shares information from various sources. Instructions on adding the widget to your blog and customizing it are available on the **Recovery Month** Web site.

## The Next Step

Use the “**New Media Glossary**” located on the online version of this toolkit to find Web sites and resources that will help you educate people about **Recovery Month** and its many messages.

Continue to visit the **Recovery Month** Web site, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, to see what new resources are available to help you connect online. Keeping ahead of the trends will make you even more Web savvy as you promote your **Recovery Month** activities and raise awareness about addiction and recovery.

**Inclusion of Web sites and other resources mentioned in this document and on the [Recovery Month Web site](#) does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.**

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